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# COLLEGE TRAINING AND THE BUSINESS MAN.

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THE world is becoming a vast industrial condition. The basis of society is changed from the military and the domestic to the economic and industrial. The conquest of the world by aggressive peoples is now made rather through the locomotive and the steel-bridge than through the rifle. In this condition the United States is a leading power. But these industrial forces which spread themselves round the world are the strongest at home. The United States is both a vast machine-shop and a vast farm; and what lies between the shop and the farm is covered by equally vast systems of railroads. These conditions are formed into great combinations of individuals and of capital. From the individual to the partnership, from the partnership to the corporation, from the corporation to the combination of corporations commonly known as the trust, is the order of development.

This industrial process and also the unifying process in industry will undoubtedly continue. A great financier of New York has recently said that the uniting of banks and financial institutions would continue, if men could be found to manage the resulting combinations.

To this condition, therefore, in which the United States finds itself, as a manager of enormous business interests, what is the relation of the American college? What can the American college do to make these interests more worthy of humanity, and more helpful to the noblest and richest life? What, too, can the American college do to make these business interests themselves more efficient and more remunerative?

The principal means which the American college can use in helping the industrial condition, lies in the furnishing of well-

equipped workers. But some affirm that the college does not equip, much less well equip, its graduates to be workers in the world's hard work. A leader in American industrial life says:

"I do not think that the college graduate has any advantages in entering business over the graduate of a high or grammar-school. My preference has always been for boys to come to me direct from school and at the age of eighteen, because my experience has shown me that the four years spent in college are not worth as much to him, if he is to become a business man or manufacturer, as the same time in actual business experience. The average college graduate is apt to feel that he is so educated that he is disinclined to begin at the bottom; or, if the case is exceptional and the young man is willing to begin on the lowest round of the ladder, he often becomes discouraged by seeing younger fellows in positions several years in advance of him. There is a great deal to be gained by the discipline of daily life that comes with drudgery, such as the washing of ink-stands, cleaning windows, carrying bundles, and sweeping out the store, although, unfortunately for the boy's own good, the conditions are such at the present day that he is not called upon to do that work as was the custom a generation ago. I used to say that I did not care to hire a boy who owned a dress suit. Of course, there are exceptions; but, if one wants to succeed as a business man, he must begin by making sacrifices, and anything which shows a tendency toward extravagance is not a promising indication. I would advise a boy of eighteen who wants to become a merchant, business man, or a distributor of products, to go into the business at that age and not go to college. I would not, however, underrate a college education. For a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, or a successful member of any of the other learned professions, I believe the university education is almost a necessity. The primary object of all education should be to teach boys and girls how to provide for themselves food, clothing, and shelter."

The proposition which I desire to support is, that the graduate of the American college, other things or qualities being the same, is best fitted to administer the great industrial movement. He is the one who, on the whole, can most wisely lead and most effectively carry forward the business interests of the United States.

In order to get a fair field for our discussion, it may be just as well at once to clear away certain difficulties. Let me say at once that certain boys should not go to college. Boys who dislike study should not go, for they are in peril of becoming social rebels and pessimists. Boys who cannot bear freedom should not go, for they are in peril of becoming slaves to unworthy habits. Boys who are lazy should not go, for they are in peril of adopting a soft,

luxurious life, which it is difficult to throw off and which ill becomes the hard worker in the workaday world of the new America. Of course, the number of boys of these three classes is not small. The going to a college is not a question touching the mass, it is a question touching the individual. Whether the son of a family should or should not go to college, is a question as personal as was the question whether the parents of that son should in the first place become husband and wife.

It is also evident that certain business callings demand a technical training. This training may be given, in part at least, through a college of liberal learning, or it may be given through a technical or scientific school. The work of the engineer, civil, mechanical, electrical, demands such a training. This training is as necessary to the engineer as is the training in law to the lawyer, or in medicine to the physician. Whether the engineer, before taking his technical studies, should first have the advantage of a general college course is a question which does not immediately relate to the present discussion, although be it said in passing that opinion is coming to favor the view that the technical school is purely a professional school.

The present discussion, moreover, does not concern the general advantages of a college course. These advantages, in the form of making desirable friendships, promoting a high type of the gentleman, inspiring one to nobler service for society and the state, no one seeks to depreciate. They are great. Even were there no other results, they would make the college course worth while to most men. A graduate who entered the cattle business, in which, too, he was not successful, says of his college course:

"I think I am safe in saying that if I had the decision to make over again I should again take the college education. It may not make great returns on the investment, in actual money, but to the man who has the taste and determination it makes, I feel, adequate returns in the enlarged field he is given for the pursuits of his life with happiness to himself, and with some benefit to those about him."

Now to the main proposition: The college man in business is worth more than the same man would be without a college education. The elements that go to make up the value of the business man to his business are many; and the elements which go to make up the value of the college to the student are also many.

First of them all is the intellectual element. The leader in a great business primarily needs, of all the intellectual parts, the power to think. "What do the men whom you employ," I asked the manager of one of the great industrial combinations, "need the most?" "Brains" was the prompt answer. "What do those men lack," I said to a great manufacturer of steel and iron products? "Accuracy, the power to take a large view and to investigate thoroughly," was the reply. The merchant and the manufacturer are called on to analyze and synthesize phenomena, to relate fact to fact and truth to truth, to assess every fact or truth at its proper value, to determine the significance of the symbol, to reason logically, to relate principle to rule and rule to principle, to trace effect to cause, to distinguish the essential from the accidental, and to hold the necessary and essential under a large variety of conditions and circumstances.

These are the very intellectual qualities which the college is supposed to discipline. The knowledge which one gains in college is of no or small consequence. In fact, knowledge as an end is vastly over-estimated in all educational judgments, and knowledge as a means to power is as vastly underestimated. Two friends of mine have recently said to me, in answer to my question regarding the good of a college course to them, that it consists in the cultivation of the primary intellectual quality of thinking. One says: "College training teaches one to go to work at any task with system and method, in the consciousness that one has acquired the ability to *think* through, quickly and logically, the questions which come up"; and another says: "College training has enabled me to appreciate more fully and to practise more diligently precision and system. Unless I am very much mistaken the close of my academic life finds me much stronger from the point of view both of synthesis and of analysis."

The men now at the head of great industrial corporations believe that this intellectual quality is of great value. Mr. W. F. Merrill, First Vice-President of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company says:

"It has been my experience that men with a college education make better help than men of about the same calibre who have not had that advantage, when they get to a point where their experience warrants putting them into advanced positions; and that it does not take them so long a time to get to a point where they can be safely promoted. A college

education gives a young man habits of study and application which are invaluable. He learns how to use his brains to better advantage than one who has not had that training. You might just as well say that an apprenticeship is of no value to a man who is going to follow a particular trade as to say, in the case of a man who is going to use his brains, it is not an advantage to him that he should learn how to use them logically by study. Brains are capable of development the same as muscles, and there is nothing that I know of that will develop brains any faster than systematic study. A well-trained mind thinks more quickly and reaches results more speedily and more accurately.”\*

In the personality of the individual student the chief effect of the college is intellectual, and the chief element in this effect is the increase in what, in a comprehensive and general way, one calls the power of thinking. But this is not the only effect. Intellectual elements do not alone constitute the causes that promote the prosperity of the individual or of the community. Some would say that volitional, emotional, ethical elements constitute causes more important than the intellectual. It is certainly true that a strong will makes as much toward the advancement of one or of all as a clear intellect. For in a strong will are embodied ambition, diligence, persistence,—qualities most valuable. Some would also say that an honest conscience is as important as either clear intellect or strong will.

Now, the training of the will in the college is a thing much more difficult to accomplish than the training of the intellect. For the will is trained by doing, and doing is not the primary function of the college, though it is one of its functions. This inability of the college to train the will in adequate ways is the chief cause of the impression that a college education is of no advantage to the business man, the man whose life consists so largely in doing things. But let no one suppose that the college does nothing in the training of the will. Every effort of the student to master a scholastic problem is an act of the will. Every decision he makes for better or for worse is an act of the will. All co-operative endeavors of college men, and such endeavors are numerous and of great variety, represent the executive function. Not a few men in every college class get larger training for their will than for their intellect.

But now reverts the question of intellectual relations. Let it

\* “The Utility of an Academic Education: an Investigation,” by R. T. Crane, p. 27.

be granted that the modern business man does need the power of thinking. How does the college increase this power more effectively than business itself?

Thinking is an art. It is, of course, also, a science. But for the college man it is primarily an art. An art is learned by practising it. Thinking is, therefore, learned by thinking. It represents habits of intellectual accuracy, discrimination, comparison, concentration. Such habits are formed by being accurate, discriminating, and by the actual concentration of the mind. A course in education promotes such thinking better than a course in business. For education represents orderliness and system in intellectual effort. The effort proceeds by certain graduated steps, from the easy to the less easy, from the difficult to the more difficult. The purpose is to train in the valuation of principles, which underlie all service, and not in the worth of rules, which are of special and narrow application. The man trained only in business of one kind is not fitted to take up business of a different kind. The broadly trained man is prepared to learn business of any kind, and if business of one kind has been learned, he is able to leave it to take up work of another kind without difficulty. The practice of any art should make the one who practises this art a better thinker in it; but this advantage relates in a large degree to one who has first approached the art through thinking.

I suppose it may be said that the man who is self-educated is usually very narrowly educated. He is educated along and in certain lines. He is educated, so to speak, tangentially. His thinking, too, is usually tangential. It lacks comprehensiveness and a sense of relations. It has force, and the endeavors which spring out of it are forceful; but breadth is sacrificed.

Many and of much variety are the methods adopted to relieve the individual of the necessity of educating himself. Schools of correspondence and evening schools have their place, and for not a few the place is large. So thoroughly worth while are these forms of education that they should be promoted, their weaknesses eliminated and their points of strength conserved. But the peril against which one is to be on guard in these more or less informal methods is the peril of substituting knowledge for thinking, information for personal inspiration, formal content of learning for large power of achievement.

These perils inhere alike in the more popular and informal

methods of education and in that technical and commercial education which the individual gets in business. The education of the college and university seeks to avoid these perils. The university offers opportunities for reasoning and for thinking of all kinds, degrees, orders. It sets forth the exact reasoning of the mathematical sciences—sciences in which things are as they are, as Bishop Butler says, and must be as they must be. It thus confirms the habit of intellectual conviction. It sets forth the general reasoning of language, literature, history and philosophy, in which truth is to be separated from truth for seeing each more clearly, in which truth is to be united with truth for establishing both more firmly. It uses analysis and synthesis. It uses deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning. It recognizes the uncertainties attending intellectual judgments; a recognition which fixes a habit of intellectual humility. It seeks to assess each fact at its proper value, to use right methods of intellectual procedure, to maintain each faculty of man's whole being in the performance of its proper function, without interference from other faculties, and to bring forth a well-ordered character as the consummate result.

In this endeavor the content of knowledge plays a less important part than is commonly believed. Content of knowledge for intellectual processes is somewhat akin to content of food for physical processes; the purpose is not to retain the content, but to convert the content into health and power. In the intellectual relation, too, as in the physical, one's appetite is a pretty good guide for the selection of content. Certainly no other guide is so good, or so little unworthy, unworthy as at times it may prove to be. To choose certain courses of study in college because one does *not* like them, on the ground that the dislike represents a certain lack of nature which these studies may help to fill, may have a certain degree, though small, of reasonableness. Such choices are medicines. Medicines are necessary, if one be sick. But the mind of the college man should be treated as if it were in a state of health. It, therefore, needs, not medicine, but food. To choose courses of study in college because one does like them, represents the hygienic process of assimilation which results in strength, health, growth.

It will usually be found, too, that studies thus chosen are most directly preparatory to one's probable calling in life. For the



desire which determines the choice of studies also determines the choice of a vocation. President Eliot writes of his son, Charles:

"He arrived at the end of his Senior year without having any distinct vision of the profession which awaited him, neither he nor his father having perceived his special gifts. Nevertheless, it turned out, after he had settled with joy on his profession, that, if he had known at the beginning of his Sophomore year what his profession was to be, he could not have selected his studies better than he did with only the guidance of his likings and natural interests. He took during his last three years in college all the courses in fine arts which were open to him; he subsequently found his French and German indispensable for wide reading in the best literature of his profession; his studies in science supplied both training and information appropriate to his calling; and history and political economy were useful to him as culture studies and for their social bearings."\*

The college course which Charles Eliot took was on the whole a broad and a broadening one. It was not so broad that it became thin or a means of intellectual dissipation. The broad course is always in peril of becoming a little thin and the narrow course of becoming narrowing. A course can safely to a degree become narrow in case a man knows the channel in which his life is to flow. But most men do not so know. "I am to-day thirty years old, I graduate as a mechanical engineer. I now know I do not want to be a mechanical engineer. I want to be a lawyer." So said a student on the Commencement Day of his Scientific School. Ignorance of one's abilities or desires or opportunities should lead one to a broad course of study in the college. Even many of the great manufacturing corporations prefer the liberally to the technically trained graduate. Said a member of a great corporation which builds steel mills round the world:

"The man of liberal education is, on the whole, worth more to us than the man of technical training. He is worth less for a year or two after coming to us, but he has a power for learning all branches of our business which are specially needed."

The peril of overeducation, for those who are to enter business, is a peril in the existence of which I find not a few "captains of industry" believe. By overeducation is meant an education of the intellect which fits the individual to do a higher work than is

\* "Charles Eliot: Landscape Architect," pp. 28-29.

actually open to him, or a higher work than his other faculties fit him to do. The point at which this danger touches the college relates to the equilibrium of personal forces. The college may draw too heavily on the intellectual resources of the individual. Strength, which in the course of his college career he should have given to the will, the conscience, the heart, the body, may have been given to the intellect. As a result, the graduate may come forth from the college halls bearing a mind disciplined to think, but lacking the power of body or of will to use this disciplined mind. He is like an engine, perfect in every part, but without sufficient steam. Mr. S. R. Callaway, formerly President of the New York Central Railroad, writes me that a friend of the late Commodore Vanderbilt bore to him from Lord Palmerston a message that it was "a pity a man with so much talent had not the advantages which education gives." "You tell Lord Palmerston from me," said the Commodore, "that if I had learned education I would not have had time to learn anything else." It is a story beneath the humor of which, says Mr. Callaway, "lies more or less of reality." The peril of the overeducation of the intellect is simply the peril of the undereducation of the will, of the conscience, of the heart, of the body. This peril is to be avoided not so much by lessening the education of the intellect as by increasing the education of the body, the heart, conscience and will. The members of the British cabinets of the last twenty-five years illustrate the advantage of a well-proportioned education. All have been, with hardly an exception, graduates of either Oxford or Cambridge; not a few have been honor men. One never forgets Gladstone with his double first-class. But besides whatever intellectual power they possessed, they have been men of great strength of body, and of distinct force of will. Unique strength of character has not segregated them from their fellows. They have been at once commanders and servants, men and gentlemen, golf-players and thinkers.

Business of every sort requires men of power: power of intellect, to think; of will, to do; of conscience, to right; of heart, to appreciate; of body, to begin and to endure. Some men possess these manifold powers more largely without a liberal education than other men with a liberal education. But the purpose of the college is not to make men equal, but to develop each to his utmost capacity of development. As a rule, both the ablest men and the

men not ablest by nature would become still more able by reason of a liberal education. This is the meaning, I take it, of Professor Elihu Thompson, who writes saying:

"The boy who does not go to college enters business life earlier, gets an early start, and perhaps loses less of the power of adaptation to his surroundings. The older a man is, the less pliable he becomes; but men differ very widely in this particular—some crystallize very early, others only in advanced age. Nevertheless, I *do* think that in the great majority of cases whatever disadvantage is at first suffered is more than made up in the end. I can see no reason why higher education should prevent or lessen success in business affairs, which success depends upon good judgment and energy. In manufacturing, and I think to an increasing extent in most business undertakings, a training which leans toward the scientific and technical will, I believe, be of the greatest value. This involves mathematical proficiency in greater or less degree; not mathematics as an abstraction, but in relation to the concrete realities."

And another says:

"If a young man forms no bad habits during his college course, he can well afford to invest four years' time in return for the college friendships, and, more especially, the taste for reading, for study, and the higher and better things of life; and if he accomplishes no more than acquiring such tastes, his time will be well spent in the pleasure and satisfaction that he will receive throughout his life, and in his ability, when he is able to do so, to retire from active business, without feeling that he can enjoy nothing but business. A young man of ability, strong, tactful, determined to succeed, will succeed, with or without a college education; and if he has to work his own way through college so much the better for him, for he starts with a distinct advantage over his fellow-students. Such a young man as I have described will soon overtake those that started in business four years before he did, and his mental training should give him a marked advantage over those that have not received it."

This question of the value of a college training to the man entering business I have discussed simply on the narrow basis of the commercial service. Of course there is another basis, and one which some would call more important. One of my correspondents speaks of a college course as fitting one "to better discern and like all that is noble and beautiful in life;" and another: "College education ought to make him a more reasonable man, and to increase his capacity for enjoyment throughout life." These are values in themselves; and, if one were inclined to urge

the point, one could show that these values have also commercial worth.

One also may be allowed to say that if civilization is to advance it is to advance, not through the selfward tendency of the individual and of individual effort, be that tendency either material or intellectual or ethical, but also through altruistic movements. One likes to quote Burke's words: "Society is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection." It is a partnership including generations yet unborn. As one reflects on the condition of the present age, as one reflects on the life of the future centuries, one realizes that the higher life of the whole race has claims upon those who live in the first decade of the twentieth century. That chief claim is to make large men.

This discussion is made forceful by liberal extracts from a few of the many letters written to me by the heads of great business corporations touching the value of a college training. The first which I submit is from Mr. Hugh J. Chisholm, President of the International Paper Company:

"I regard a man equipped with a college education, two years' technical and two years' law-school training, as the best-equipped material to build upon, if he is entering into and expecting to follow a manufacturing, mercantile, or banking business; and, after a man trained in this way gets the practical knowledge of the business in which he engages, he has a better combination of qualities than the man possessing knowledge acquired from practical encountering or conducting of any of the above referred to lines of business, whose education is confined to that which he has received from the high school. The very serious objection, however, to acquiring such a college education as outlined above, is the time it consumes, assuming that it takes from four to six years as the shortest time possible to so equip a young man. The boy who leaves the high school and commences at once from that point to get practical knowledge of the business or commercial life, has certainly an advantage later in life when he encounters the college graduate who is just commencing his business career, and by the lack of this practical, technical knowledge, the college graduate is handicapped when brought in competition with the young man who has devoted his time to the learning of the business into which he may have entered. But, assuming that they both possess equal mental and physical ability, in the four or six years following, the college graduate ought to excel the young man whose education has been confined to the high school. In my judgment, the college presidents of the present day have no more serious problem to intelligently and practically work out than that of

properly establishing a course of studies in the great colleges of this country, which will take into consideration how best to educate and equip that portion of their students who intend to follow a commercial calling rather than a profession, realizing, as every thinking man does to-day, the great demand that has been created for the highest type of intellectual ability, integrity, and executive ability, necessary to manage successfully and honestly the great amount of capital that has been and is being concentrated in the large industrial corporations of this country."

John W. Dunn, President of the International Steam Pump Company, says:

"Although I did not myself enjoy the benefits of a college education, having left school at an early age to go to work for my living, I do not share the prejudice against a college education which is expressed by some of our self-made men. I believe that the theoretical foundation which a young man receives at a well-conducted college can be of great use to him in after-life, provided that on leaving college he is willing to begin at the bottom of the ladder to learn practically any business he may choose to enter upon, without bringing with him any false idea that the learning that he has acquired from his books and his professors absolves him from going through precisely the same course of practical training that he would have had to undergo if he had gone directly from school or high school to a shop or factory. We have in our various companies a number of young men who are graduates of the various technical institutes, and whom we are willing to assist in making their way, provided they are content to begin as common operatives, like any ordinary working-man who is to earn his living. To any young man who is content to take up his work in this frame of mind, I believe that a professional education will be of great value after he had thoroughly mastered the practical details of his work, and familiarized himself with those matters which can only be acquired by actual experience, and by actual contact with business and with men. Any young man, however, who is imbued with a belief that because he has gone through college he has nothing further to learn, and is superior to the necessities which those who have had no such advantages are compelled to recognize, will find that his college education is not only of no benefit to him, but is a positive hindrance to his success in life. My observation of young men, in whom I have always taken a great deal of interest, has led me to believe that the main reason why so many college men are not as successful in business as others who have only had the very plainest rudiments of an education is, that by reason of the species of conceit to which I have just referred their minds are closed to those sources of instruction and training which they would otherwise gladly avail themselves of, and to which the success of most of our self-made men is in a considerable measure due. I believe that all of our best colleges recognize the truth of what I have just said, and take pains to instil

it into the minds of their students. That is to say, they impress upon them that when they leave college they have not learned everything there is to know, but are only on the threshold, and that the advantages they have had over other men will not avail them unless they apply themselves to their business with the same energy, fidelity, and perseverance that those other men habitually employ."

Mr. J. Ogden Armour, of Chicago, through his secretary states:

"That, in his opinion, the solution of this question, as far as commercial success is concerned, is not so much one of the abstract value of advanced education, as compared with that obtained in the public schools, as it is of adaptability to the chosen pursuit of the student. He, of course, recognizes the very great value of a complete education, but he thinks it is to be largely measured, in relation to success in commercial affairs, by the trustworthiness, ambition, and perseverance that accompany it. With these fundamental qualifications, and others which naturally suggest themselves, opportunities for a successful career would unquestionably occur. Mr. Armour's action regarding employees in his own business is practically wholly independent of the possession by them of exceptional educational advantages. He does not, however, desire to underrate the desirability of the highest education possible, but thinks that commercial success is chiefly dependent upon qualifications which may or may not accompany exceptional scholastic attainment."

Mr. Wyerhaeuser of Wyerhaeuser & Company, of St. Paul, writes:

"The disadvantages under which a college graduate labors when he enters business are that he is pretty well advanced towards manhood, is awkward, has had no business training, and is apt to think that because he is a college graduate he ought not be obliged to commence at the bottom of the ladder and work up, as the office boy does who enters the office when he is fourteen years of age. If he is a man of good sense and does not think too much of his college education, by the time he is forty years of age he has a great many advantages over the boy who left school at eighteen, and it must be a source of great satisfaction to him during his life that he has had the benefit of a college education. I, by all means, would recommend to a boy who is inclined to study, a course in some good college. He certainly, in the course of time, will find that he is amply repaid for it. The boy who is bright and starts in business after graduating from the high school will, for the first ten years, get along much better and be happier than the man who has spent four or five years attending college, and may have made a good start towards laying the foundation for a profitable business long before the college man gets an insight into the business. Still, I think

the college graduate, by the time he reaches seventy, would have had the most satisfactory life, and, perhaps, would be fully as successful as the man who has not been fortunate enough to possess a college education."

Mr. Powell Stackhouse, of the Cambria Steel Company, says:

"I hold that a young man of proper physical and mental balance cannot be overeducated. In the manufacture of steel (and the same is true of any modern manufacturing operations), a thorough technical education is an essential, as without it a limit of advancement will sooner or later be reached. In the commercial line it may not be so essential, but is a great advantage. It is true that there are many notable men who, without the advantages of a technical education, have risen to the top of their profession; these are the exceptions in many thousands, and are only such as have the natural ability, coupled with great perseverance and the self-denial afterwards to educate themselves, and they cannot be raised as objections, but as an incentive to a thorough college education. It does not follow by any means that because a young man has passed a college life with credit, he will necessarily be a success in any line he may select. He has only been furnished with the mental tools to work with, and their after application depends upon his use and the opportunities thereby afforded. Any failure of a young man to secure the most advanced education he possibly can must in some time of his future life operate detrimentally."

Such testimonies I might call to great number and length. But enough has been said to prove that the managers of the great business undertakings of the present and of the future will receive large advantage from the college. To the merchant, the manufacturer and the administrator the college offers an understanding more comprehensive, a sense of relationship more just, as well as a training of the will more adequate for large undertakings. The college helps to create the man of sobermindedness, of personal resolution, who is intent on things of the mind. It aids, let us believe, in nourishing the noblest type of the gentleman. But, while causing these richest personal results, it is also training great executives for the great affairs of the United States and of the world.

CHARLES F. THWING.